DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 863 IR 019 084

AUTHOR	Streibel, Michael J.
TITLE	The Importance of Physical Place and Lived Topographies.
PUB DATE	1998-02-00
NOTE	12p.; In: Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Presentations at the National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) Sponsored by the Research and Theory Division (20th, St. Louis, MO, February 18-22, 1998); see IR 019 040.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	American Indians; Cultural Context; Distance Education; *Educational Environment; Educational Research; Educational Technology; *Environmental Influences; Environmental Research; *Ethnography; Literature Reviews; *Physical Environment; Research Needs; Role; Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS	*Apache (Tribe); Learning Environment; *Place Identity

ABSTRACT

This paper articulates a framework for thinking about the role of place in human experience. The question of why physical place is important in all experience is dealt with through a review of recent work on the concept of place, including Keith Basso's ethnographic work with the Western Apache on their belief that an enduring sense of place entails a complex array of symbolic relationships with their physical surroundings. This suggests that an ethnography of lived topographies has to combine the symbolic and the concrete. Basso's example offers specific ways that physical place plays a role in the daily practice of another culture and suggests that an an ethnography of lived topographies cannot simply deal with the physical characteristics of places but must also deal with the moral imagination that persons bring to the sensing of those places. An agenda for further research about place in the field education is presented. (Contains 42 references.) (AEF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Simonson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

To be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place.
Place is the phenomenal particularization of 'being-in-the-world.'
Edward Casey (1993: xv)

The Importance of Physical Place And Lived Topographies

Michael J. Streibel
The University of Wisconsin – Madison

ED 423 863

Abstract

This paper is motivated by a simple question: when is it important to be physically present in teaching and learning? I will not answer this question directly but rather will articulate a framework for thinking about the role of place in human experience. The motivating question becomes all the more important when one realizes, as does Joshua Meyrowitz in No Sense of Place, that "electronic media destroy the specialness of place" and lead to a loss of sense of place (Meyrowitz, 1985: 125), and when one realizes, as does Michael Heim in Virtual Realism, that most human beings "now dwell in an artificial environment" which is on the verge of becoming virtualized by networked electronic media (Heim, 1998: 153). The original question then becomes: why is physical place even important in our experience? I will try to answer this latter question by reviewing recent work on the concept of place and then presenting Keith Basso's ethnographic work with the Western Apache on their belief that Wisdom Sits in Places (1996). I will end by sketching out further research questions for our field on an "ethnography of lived topographies" in learning places.

Why is Physical Place Important in Our Experience? A Digression

The simplest answer can be stated as follows: we are all embedded in a physical matrix of human and "more-than-human" beings and our lifeworld is situated in the here and now. Furthermore, this physical matrix plays a pervasive role in the construction of cultural and personal identity, so that the more we become distanced from this physical matrix, the more we become distanced from the grounds of our lifeworld and ultimately from the grounds of our being-in-the-world. We, therefore, have to understand the role that this physical matrix plays in all areas of human endeavor. Since physical place is one fundamental aspect of our immediate physical matrix (our bodies are another), focusing on the role of physical place in our experience would do much to further our understanding. To paraphrase Wendell Berry's famous conclusion: we don't know *who* we are unless we know *where* we are (Stegner, 1992: 199).

I was led to this conclusion by an indirect route. I have critiqued the role of computers in education for many years (Streibel, 1986) and have attempted, along with many others in our field, to reformulate traditional theories of instructional development in constructivist directions (Streibel, 1987, 1993, 1996). This led me to look seriously at Lucy Suchman's theory of situated action where physical place played a central role (Streibel, 1995). Contemporary theories of instructional development, however, had very little to say about the physical place where learning was to take place other than in terms of ergonomic factors (Gustafson & Branch, 1997). This current state of affairs in our field could very well reflect the early theoretical influences of behaviorism, communication theory, and systems theory as Rita Richey has shown (Richey, 1986). More recent developments in cognitive theories and information processing theories refine these trends by focusing on what happens inside the "black box" of the learner but little attention is paid to the physical place of learning as a constitutive component of learning (Reigeluth, 1983). Constructivist theories of instructional development moved "outside of the box" by focusing on the social context of learning and the social construction of meaning (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Recent developments in constructivist theories have even focused on the design of whole learning environment (Duffy *et. al.*, 1993) and totally virtual classrooms (Hiltz, 1994). However, the physical setting of learning is still not integrated into an ecology of learning except in its ergonomic potential. Speaking of education in general, David Orr, in *Ecological Literacy*, says that:

> other than as a collection of buildings where learning is supposed to take place, place has no particular standing in contemporary education (Orr, 1992: 126).

IR019084

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The same can be said for distance education where "anytime, anyplace" in "virtual classrooms" is promised (Evans & Nations 1989; Keegan, 1996). Perhaps some very deep theoretical assumptions are still very much in force even though specific theories of instructional development have progressed very much. Perhaps the time has come to revisit some of these very deep assumptions. I contend that the concept of place is one of these deep theoretical assumptions that needs to be revisited in order to further our understanding.

Why is Physical Place Important? Some Background

Let me situate my initial answer with some background. A number of scholars such as Edward Casey are calling for a "renewed understanding of the place-world" as a matter of global survival (Casey, 1993). David Orr, in *Ecological Literacy*, claims that:

> education relevant to the transition to a sustainable society, demands first, *an uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation* (Orr, 1992: 133).

Furthermore, real learning "foster[s] a sense of connectedness, implicatedness, and ecological citizenship" and entails a "dialogue with a place" (Orr, 1992: 103, 90). Other researchers, such as C. A. Bowers, on the other hand, have shown how our use of technology is ecologically unsustainable because it embodies cultural values that separate us for the world and cast us in the role of controlling and dominating the material world (Bowers, 1988, 1993, 1994). These contemporary cultural values reflect a kind of psychological modernism that is so aptly described by Thomas Moore in his book *Care of the Soul* (1992). Psychological modernism is:

> an uncritical acceptance of the values of the modern world. It includes blind faith in technology, inordinate attachment to material gadgets and conveniences, uncritical acceptance of the march of scientific progress, devotion to electronic media, and a life-style dictated by advertising. This orientation toward life also tends toward a mechanistic and rationalistic understanding of matters of the heart (Moore, 1992: 206).

Moore continues by saying that when "technology becomes the root metaphor .... there sometimes seems to be an inverse relationship between information and wisdom (Moore, 1992: 206-7). Moore's response is to propose a *reconnection with the physical particularities of person and place* as a way to learn about "fate, time, nature, morality, and character ... [things that are] important in life" (Moore, 1992: 216).

A simple way to characterize this loss of connection with place engendered by psychological modernism is to compare "digital living," as described by Nicholas Negrponte in *Being Digital* (1995) and William Mitchell in *City of Bits* (1995), with "embodied living," as described by Thomas Moore in *Care of the Soul* (1992) and David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996). The comparison comes down to a difference in priveledging the abstract over the concrete. For example, it comes down to a difference between (Streibel, 1997):

1. abstract representations of place (or explicit knowledge of the world - e.g., virtual places, digital representations, etc.) vs. embodied engagement with specific places (i.e., tacit knowledge of the world).
2. abstract representations of self and other (e.g., data structures, avatars, etc.) vs. embodied lifeworlds of self and other.
3. abstract representations of interactions (e.g., intelligent tutoring systems, automated workflow systems, etc.) vs. physically-embodied cultural lifeworlds.

I have cast these distinctions in *either-or* terms in order to highlight their differences. However, if we are to frame a concept of place that furthers our understanding of *both* the technological *and* the natural realms, then we have to come up with a framework that encompasses both and does justice to both. We have, in other words, to avoid *either-or* thinking and *combine the abstract with the concrete* in our thinking and acting. This means *both* an avoidance on over-reliance on abstractions *and* an avoidance of reifying place. I believe that a relational concept of place will help us in this effort. There are many proposals about how to proceed. I will only sketch out a few such proposals and show what they add to a relational concept of place before proceeding to Basso's work which I believe holds the most promising ideas.

Michael Heim in both his earlier work on *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (1993) and his current work on *Virtual Realism* (1998) argues that technologically-mediated virtual worlds and the natural world (or the primary world, as he calls it) make different demands on our bodies so that we basically have to become competent at operating in two worlds. Hence, we have to learn how to become totally immersed in virtual work (and learning) environments and then develop a whole series of "decompression" rituals such as Tai Chi (Chuan) and Chi Kung in order to "reclaim the integrity of conscious life in a biological body" (Heim, 1998: 172). These biologically-embodied physical rituals, in effect, resituate our consciousness in our body's physical place. Heim's proposals are a

step in the right direction by focusing on the role of our physical body in achieving a reconnection with the physical world. However, Heim's proposals still set up physical and virtual place in opposition.

Other authors make more radical proposals. Let me give you one example from Edith Cobb in her work on *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* (Cobb, 1977). Although her work predates the widespread use of computers, her work with children is a prime example of reconnecting with the physical world. Cobb recounts the story of a young girl who was extremely disassociated from her body and her world except when she went on summer vacations in Michigan. The young girl wrote in her diary as she was recovering by reliving the memory and imagery of her summer world:

> Big trees, pine trees swishing in the wind. The Mountain, blue and hazy in the distance, grass blowing below the waves on the ocean. Sticky bark, blue jeans, that was Michigan - and tennis, lots of it, every day. Then a cool swim, dive off the dock and the water rushing by, swimming, lying on the raft, picnics on the beach, the Point, singing, and marshmallows, sweet and black (Cobb, 1977: 76).

What you see here, as Cobb concludes, is a young girl whose "body image and world image had conjoined, giving a sense of true identity" (Cobb, 1977, 76). Cobb also concludes that:

> individual health is a successful adaptation to the cosmos as well as to culture and society and that this adaptation is temporal and well as spatial - [a mutual adaptation that can] best [be] described by the word 'ecological' (Cobb, 1977:74-5).

The world of a specific physical place and the imaginative memory of that place formed a *both-and* relation which led to physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, *true identity entailed a particularist conjoining of the physical and social worlds.*

The idea that physical place has an impact on our mental well being is becoming a major focus in Architectural design. Since the 1960's, architects such as Christopher Alexander have begun to show that habitability in specific physical places is part of *a deep "pattern language" of all living beings,* and, therefore, calls for a "timeless way of building" (Alexander, 1977, 1979). A key aspect of this timeless pattern language is a "quality [which] is objective and precise, but [which] cannot be named." However,

> in order to define this quality ... we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events which keep on happening there (Alexander, 1979: ix-x).

Patterns of living in a place, rather than a reified quality, become the grounds of objectivity. As to naming, Basso will show how the Western Apache culture succeeded in naming such a quality with place-names.

Architects also began to make the case that architecture is a form of healing because of the way that people were influenced by their physical places. For example, Christopher Day, in *Places of the Soul* (1990), calls for designing physical places with "health-giving intent" because "our environment is part of our biography" (Day, 1990: 23). Day is not arguing that a physical place has a reified "spirit" which somehow magically fosters healing. Rather:

> where the environment can offer interest, activity and intriguing ambiguity, timeless durability and a sense of roots (in place, past and future) in the wider natural world with its renewing rhythms .... it can provide support as the first step to recovery (Day, 1990: 26).

How can we approach virtual environments so that they become part of our biography and history in a health-giving way - especially in light of Bower's and Heim's claim that such environments distance us from our physical bodies and the physical places we inhabit? I am only asking this question rhetorically at this point because I want to develop a framework that can begin to address this question. One thing is clear, however. Any new framework has to begin by "embracing the real" and coming to terms with our relationship to physical places. Chellis Glendinning gives a deep reason why this should be the case. In her book, *My Name Is Chellis and I'm In Recovery from Western Civilization*, she writes that:

> our primal matrix grew from the Earth, is inherently part of the Earth, and is built to thrive in intimacy with the Earth (Glendinning, 1994: 16).

Others echo her concern. Charlene Spretnak, in *The Resurgence of the Real*, argues that:

> a truly *post*modern alternative would counter the modern ideological flight from body, nature, and place (Spretnak, 1997: 223).

Hence, a truly postmodern alternative framework would be an *"ecological postmodernism" that focuses on nature, body, and place*. The rest of this paper focuses primarily on place although the other elements are never far away.

The idea of "embracing the real" is not without its dangers because it could lead us back down a path of opposing the abstract and the concrete in an either-or fashion. Hence, we could claim, as does Bill McKibben in *The Age of Missing Information* (1992), that real information can only flow into us through unmediated experience. (McKibben compared watching 24-hours worth of many TV channels over a several month period with a twenty-four hour period out in the Adirondacks). However, both mediated and unmediated (i.e., technologically-mediated and embodied) experiences are "real" in the sense of becoming part of our personal and social biographies. Focusing on how we perceptually-engage other beings no matter what the manner and how this contributes to our personal and social biographies, therefore, seems a better and more fruitful path to follow. This does not discount the real differences between mediated and embodied experiences but it helps us "move out of the map, [and] into the territory," to use David Abram's felicitous phrase, without jettisoning the map (Abram, 1995: 97).

As to arguing for the primacy of engaging the physical world, Abram, in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous*(1996), uses Merleau Ponty's notion of "perceptual reciprocity" to claim that *both* our physical bodies *and* the physical world are always required for meaning.

> The world and I reciprocate each other, [he claims, such that] our spontaneous experience of the world [is] charged with subjective, emotional, and intuitive content [that] remains *the vital ground ... of all our objectivity* (Abram, 1996: 33-34).

This "vital ground ... of all our objectivity" will be a key component of a relational concept of place. Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, comes a similar conclusion. "The desire for a congenial integration of body and environment," he writes, "is expressed in a yearning for a sense of place" (Berleant, 1997: 108). (Berleant also says that "continuity [of body and environment] is not always positive" and cites the Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project in St. Louis. 1997:109).

The idea of a "sense of place" in terms of specific local particularities is linked by other authors to ideas of community and the social construction of meaning. Tony Hiss, in *The Experience of Place*, has shown how a sense of place

> allows any of us a direct sense of continuing membership in our communities, and our regions, and the fellowship of all living creatures (Hiss, 1990: xiii).

David Abram expands the notion of communities to encompass the"more-than-human-world" of living and non-living beings (such as whole eco-systems). In each of these cases, personal and communal identity is involved in our engagement with the physical world. This conclusion is made explicit by Daniel Kemmis in *Community and the Politics of Place* where he argues that

> public life can only be reclaimed by understanding, and then practicing, its connection to real, identifiable places (Kemmis, 1990: 6).

Kemmis' ultimate claim is that "no real culture can exist in abstraction from place" (Kemmis, 1990: 7). I would only add that *no real culture can exist in abstraction alone*.

Hence, we come full circle to the premise of this paper, namely, that a new framework for how we construct meaning has to start with our experience of physical place. I would now like to turn to Keith Basso's work with one native American nation - the Western Apache. My reason for choosing this line of inquiry is because the Western Apache embody a relational concept of place in their daily practice. This is not to suggest that we become like the Western Apache or that we appropriate their cultural constructions for our own purposes and interests. Rather, there is much we can learn from them. Although, as Berleant says in *Living in the Landscape*,

> the native North American peoples often identified their bodies in a literal sense with the land and with other things, living and non-living, whose home is that land,

they also hold a view that sees

humans as an interrelated part of the natural world and that world as a congruent whole, all parts of which possess value and deserve respect (Berleant, 1997: 99).

It is this latter commitment which I would like to retain as I develop a relational concept of place and eventually an "ethnography of lived topographies" for our field, to use Basso's term for his methodology (Basso, 1996: 110). Berleant is even more explicit about this commitment and its relevance to a concept of place, *Our identity as beings in a world of living and non-living beings,* he claims, *is "bound up with its physical place of inhabitation"* (Berleant, 1997: 100).

Wisdom Sits in Places: An Example of a Relational Concept of Place

Keith Basso spent fifteen years living and working with the Western Apache in Cibecue, Arizona. Then, after being asked by tribal elders, he mapped out the living presence of physical places in their community. These places were

places not far away ... places made memorable, and infinitely imaginable, by events that happened long ago when the people's distant ancestors were settling into the country (Basso, 1996: 8).

The maps of these places were not drawings with Cartesian coordinates but maps of the eye and the mind. The maps contained *place-names* that were "bold, visual, [and] evocative" and *stories* of memorable events in those places that contained lessons for right action. Although place-names were used as "situating devices" in all forms of stories, they were used in *historical tales* as "instrument[s] of survival" (Basso, 1996: 131). An example of a general situating place-name would be "Water Flows Inward Under a Cottonwood Tree." An example of a place-name with an historical tale is "Men Stand Above Here and There." Let me use Basso's own words to describe how the latter place-name was used in a contemporary situation:

> In early June 1977, a seventeen-year-old Apache woman attended a girl's puberty ceremonial at Cibecue with her hair rolled up in a set of pink plastic curlers. She had returned home two days before from a boarding school in Utah where this sort of ornamentation was considered fashionable by her peers. Something so mundane would have gone unnoticed by others were it not for the fact that Western Apache women of all ages are expected to appear at puberty ceremonials with their hair worn loose. This is one of several ways that women have of showing respect for the ceremonial and also, by implication, for the people who have staged it. The practice of presenting oneself with free-flowing hair is also understood to contribute to the ceremonial's effectiveness. Apaches hold that the ritual's most basic objectives, which are to invest the pubescent girl with qualities necessary for life as an adult, cannot be achieved unless standard forms of respect are faithfully observed. On this occasion at Cibecue, everyone was following custom except the young woman who arrived wearing curlers. She soon became an object of attention and quiet expressions of disapproval, but no one spoke to her about the cylindrical objects in her hair.
>
> Two weeks later, the same young woman made a large stack of tortillas and brought them to the camp of her maternal grandmother, a widow in her mid-sixties who had organized a small party to celebrate the birthday of her eldest grandson. Eighteen people were on hand, myself included, and all of us were treated to hot coffee and a dinner of boiled beef and potatoes. When the meal was over, casual conversation began to flow, and the young woman seated herself on the ground next to her younger sister. And then - quietly, deftly, and quite without warning - her grandmother narrated a version of the historical tale about the forgetful Apache policeman who behaved too much like a whiteman. Shortly after the story was finished, the young woman stood up, turned away wordlessly, and walked off in the direction of her home. Uncertain of what had happened, I asked her grandmother why she had departed. Has the young woman suddenly become ill? "No," her grandmother replied. "I shot her with an arrow."
>
> Approximately two years after this incident occurred, I found myself in the company of the young woman with the taste for distinctive hairstyles. She had purchased a large carton of groceries at the trading post at Cibecue, and when I offered to drive her home with them she accepted. I inquired on the way if she remembered the time that her grandmother had told us the story about the forgetful policeman. She said she did and then went on, speaking in English, to describe her reactions to it. "I think maybe my grandmother was getting after me, but then I think maybe not, maybe she's working on somebody else. Then I think back on that dance and I know it's me for sure. I sure don't like how she's talking about me, so I quit looking like that. I threw those curlers away." In order to reach the young woman's camp, we had to pass

within a few hundred yards of Men Stand Above Here and There, the place where the man had lived who was arrested for rustling in the story. I pointed it out to my companion. She said nothing for several moments. Then she smiled and spoke softly in her own language: "I know that place. It stalks me every day (Basso, 1990:56-57).

What we have here are all the elements of place in Western Apache culture:

- place-names (i.e., Men Stand Above Here and There) that tie events in a narrative to physical places.
- stories that are "concerned with disruptive social acts ... [and] a stark reminder that trouble would not have occurred if people had behaved in ways they knew they should" (Basso, 1996: 28).
- place-names that give the listener "pictures to work with" rather than moral injunctions.
- physical places that "stalk" the listener and "proclaim by their presence and their names both the immanence of chaos and the preventive wisdom of moral norms" (Basso, 1996: 28).

All of the elements of place, person, situation, and communal historical story are fused into a semiotic relationship. Furthermore, each element changes as a result of this fusion:

- the specific physical place becomes an individual's personally-storied place. It is henceforth permanently experienced in a different way.
- the specific person becomes more linked with the historical community whether he or she chooses to heed the "wisdom" of the historical story.
- the specific situation becomes a unique instance of an historical story.
- the historical story is both reinforced and enriched for future use by how the specific individual makes it part of their personal biography.

In an ironic (to us) way, this is "history without authorities" that simultaneously honors the "wisdom" of the elders. Physical place plays a crucial role here because it is a relatively stable witness by it presence. However, physical place can only play this role in communal sense-making (and survival) when individuals form an "enduring bond with [these] physical places." Place is not an absolute, external reality but a very real and objective part of everyday experience.

The reason that physical place can play such a central role in everyday experience as well as in personal biography and communal history is because

> the constructions Apaches impose upon their landscape have been fashioned from the same cultural materials as constructions they impose upon themselves as members of society (Basso, 1996: 102).

These "cultural materials" are only dependent on an identification of person and place in a phenomenological sense. Physical places, in effect, are not "brought fully into being" until a biography and history of lived relationships has accrued in that place. In the historical place-name example above, a hundred-year-old story of cultural resistance in a specific place was used in a way that the intended hearer of the story would henceforth take very personally. Only then could the physical place "speak" to the hearer. Only then could the physical place "stalk" the hearer. The emotional and meaningful context of such "speaking" and "stalking" would come from the fusion of hearer, community, and place. As Basso concludes, "selfhood and placehood are completely intertwined" (Basso, 1996: 146).

The use of place-names in Western Apache historical stories entails a "running exchange of depicted pictures." At first sight, this might seem like an act of visual memory - much like Yates described in *The Art of Memory* (1966). However, the Western Apache use of place-names goes much further. Each person in the "exchange of depicted pictures" helps construct a unique interactive communication for the hearer. The hearer, in turn, has to "add on" by first drawing on his or her own memory of specific places and stories and, then, by reflecting on how these places and their stories apply to their own unique situation. The cultural construction of meaning, therefore, plays out in both the community and in each individual. Physical place plays a key role here because it is an enduring place/event which shapes the life of the community as well as the life of the individual. Basso writes that

> if the message is taken to heart by the person at whom the tale is aimed ... a lasting bond will have been created between the individual and the site .... [once this has happened] the features of the physical landscape take over and perpetuate [the bond] (Basso, 1996: 55, 60).

The uniqueness and abidingness of place, in effect, *contributes to the uniqueness and abidingness of personal and communal meaning*.

There is much we can learn from the Western Apache about an enduring sense of place. For the Western Apache, an enduring sense of place comes from "lives spent sensing places" and a slow accrual of "multiple lived relationships that people maintain with places" (Basso, 1996: 144, 106). Basso, therefore, concludes that

> this reciprocal relationship - a relationship in which individuals invest themselves in the landscape while incorporating its meanings into their own fundamental experience - is the ultimate source of the rich sententious potential and functional versatility of Western Apache place-names (Basso, 1996, 102).

If we are going to develop a concept of place, we are also going to have to look at how people live their lives sensing places and how they maintain lived relationships with other people in specific places. We will, in effect, have to follow Basso's lead and undertake an "ethnography of lived topographies" if we are going to make any progress.

An enduring sense of place for the Western Apache also entails a close identification of person, place, and the *moral imagination*. Once this is done, sensing places becomes a common, everyday cultural activity and place-making becomes a "universal genre of experience" and a "universal tool of the human imagination." Basso, therefore, concludes that

> if place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable way of *doing* history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are* in a sense [under such conditions], the place-worlds we imagine (Basso, 1996: 7).

This suggests that an ethnography of lived topographies cannot simply deal with the physical characteristics of places but must also deal with the moral imagination that persons bring to the sensing of those places.

Finally, an enduring sense of place for the Western Apache entails a "complex array of symbolic relationships with their physical surroundings" (Basso, 1996: 66). These symbolic relationships are not lived in terms of abstract generalities, but in terms of "symbolically drawn particulars" (Basso, 1996: 144). This suggests that an ethnography of lived topographies has to combine the symbolic and the concrete.

An Agenda for Further Research About Place: More Questions

The discussion so far has highlighted a general rationale for the importance of physical place in our thinking and elaborated specific characteristics of a concept of place that fit into this larger rationale. Basso's example, on the other hand, has offered some specific ways that physical place plays a role in the daily practice of another culture and what that might suggest for an ethnography of lived topographies. What do all these conclusions suggest for further research in our field? I will pose a number of questions which I believe emerge from the discussion.

The most general rationale for the importance of physical place in our lives has to do with reconnecting to the physical world as a culture in the interests of long-term sustainability. David Orr, in *Ecological Literacy*, makes the case that all professions in the modern world have to reexamine how they are a contributory part of modernism and how they can become a contributory part of "ecological postmodernism." The most general question I have, therefore, is:

1. *how can we reformulate the ideas and practices of our field so that they contribute to the transition to an ecologically-sustainable society?*

   This question might seem so general that it is of little practical value. However, if the key to long-term ecological sustainability is an "uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation" (Orr, 1992: 133) and one way such a commitment can be pursued is by constantly reconnecting our life-worlds with the physical matrix of our existence no matter what our culture, then we can develop some operational specificity to the general question by focusing on physical place. The question then becomes:

2. *how can we reformulate the ideas and practices of our field so that they contribute to a sense of connectedness with our physical world?*

   I have briefly shown, via Basso's work, how the Western Apache culture has done this. However, how do we reformulate the ideas and practices of our field when our personal and social lives are so mediated by technology that our distance from the physical world may be great? The answer to this latter questions is surprisingly simple: we never left the physical world in the first place, we just theorized about it as if it did not matter. Hence, all we have to do is:

a. theoretically - bring the phenomena of everyday practice back into view, and,
b. methodologically - bring an "ethnography of lived topographies" into our research.

This will then help us document how people actually construct personal and social meanings and then help us investigate how they develop a sense of connectedness with the material world.

For persons such as Heim who begin by investigating the phenomenological experience of virtual reality, their research indicates a bifurcation of the experience of virtual and natural worlds. The question then becomes:

3. *How can we incorporate the experience of physical reality into the very concepts and practices of our field?*

My suggestion is that we incorporate a relational concept of place into our thinking and practice. The Western Apache provide a very comprehensive example of a relational concept of place in practice where an understanding of placehood contributes to an understanding of selfhood and social survival.

At this point, a whole line of inquiry could branch off and investigate how personal and social identities are constructed on the basis of body-experience rather than place-experience. I have not pursued this line of inquiry. Others have, from Edmund Husserl, who based his phenomenology on the experience of the body (Husserl, 1960), to Luce Irigaray, who argued that all spaces are gendered (and contested) because they are ultimately based on the experience of gendered bodies (Irigaray, 1993). However, I want to stay focused on the concept of physical place as a foundational concept because I want to address the notion of connectedness rather than difference. This means dealing with how real people live together in real places with other beings. The question then becomes:

4. *how can an ethonography of lived topographies be woven into the work of our field so that our ideas and practices reflect a connection with the physical world?*

I have deliberately left the issue of "digital living" open (i.e., when only the technologically-mediated representations of a person are physically present). Any concept of physical place that entails an accrual process of living in physical places would have to accommodate the physical as well as the semiotic dimensions of representations. I know this is an odd way of stating the issue because semiotic theories deal more with the semantic content of representations than with the physicality of representations. However, if, as the Western Apache have shown in their culture, physical places are "brought fully into being" through a process of sensing and dwelling in *storied* places, then a question for our field becomes:

5. *What is brought fully into being in our cultural context through a process of sensing and dwelling <u>in</u> physical places <u>with</u> mediated representations of people and places? (i.e., what stories come along with representations?)*

For the time being, however, I only want to focus on the effect that a process of sensing and dwelling in physical places has on our construction of meaning. This line of inquiry, therefore, leads to the question:

6. *What characteristics would a relational concept of place have to have to begin to answer all of the previous questions?*

From the earlier part of this paper, a relational concept of place should bring us into closer relation with the physical world and its patterns of "renewing rhythms." This means that it would have to situate us in the physical realm of inhabitation and in the symbolic realm of our social understandings while simultaneously fostering a connectedness with the larger patterns of the world.

A relational concept of place should also foster a greater understanding of our physical and social placeworld by using terms which apply equally well to person, place, and community. This means using terminology that avoids both reification of abstract concepts and reification of concrete places. Let me give you an example from Basso. Basso shows that the Western Apache sense of place is *not*: (Basso, 1996: 143):

- an instinctual *need* of survival (although it contributes to survival)
- a beneficial *attribute* of healthy personality development (although it may have that effect)
- a *mech nism* of social integration (although it may have this effect)

In my discussion I have also argued that the Western Apache sense of place is *not:*

- a cognit ve *structure* of visual memory.

Each of these terms (i.e., need, attribute, mechanism, and structure) are abstractions which become reified abstractions when used as explanations. This is something that a relational concept of place seeks to avoid. On the other hand, Basso has also shown that specific physical places are not absolute, objective entities which have power independently of cultural context. Hence, in Western Apache culture, specific places only "speak" once a pattern of lived relationships has occurred in that place. This, in effect, avoids a reification of

specific places. I will generalize Basso's conclusions by claiming that any relational concept of place should avoid these dual reifications but rather express a particularist integration of the physical and social worlds.

A relational concept of place should also help us articulate an ecology of learning. The word ecology is used rather loosely here but it gains specificity if we follow Cobb and believe that this should entail a conjoining of body and place image. Let me give you some specific research questions that would emerge from such an approach:

a. *what are the semiotic relationships that teachers and learners have with respect to their physical places of teaching and learning and how does this semiotic relationship affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning?*

To get a glimpse of an answer, imagine in your mind, if you will, the best teachers you ever had. Do you remember the place where your interaction with them took place? Did that place play a role in your interaction?

b. *what communal stories about the places of teaching and learning do people bring to bear in the act of teaching and learning and how do these stories shape their subsequent ideas and actions?*
c. *how do individuals situate themselves in these storied teaching and learning places and how do they appropriate these stories into their personal biographies?*
d. *how do individual appropriations of storied teaching and learning places reenter larger communal histories?*
e. *how should we design physical teaching and learning places so that when people engage in virtual teaching and learning at a distance, the fused physical/virtual places still connect them to sustainable patterns in the larger world?*

A relational concept of place also has to lead to an understanding of a sense of place that is both rooted in the real and connected to multiple communities of human and more-than-human beings. One way to achieve this is to take a phenomenological approach and investigate how people are engaged in a "perceptual reciprocity" with places and other beings. A phenomenological approach permits us to see:

a. how a place is given its character by the pattern of lived relationships that transpire there,
b. how a person builds up a biography on the basis of perceptually engaging specific places and people,
1. how a community builds up semiotic relationships with places and other people.

In the case of the Western Apache, Basso used a phenomenological approach to show how their daily discourse/practices fused person, place, and stories into living semiotic relationships. What would a phenomenological approach show us about our daily discourse/practices?

If the ideas presented so far have any merit, then a relational concept of place will have to uncover specific cultural constructions that reflect the biographies and histories of lived relationships. In the case of the Western Apache, their relational concept of place was flexible enough to be tied to:

a. specific, concrete storied places,
b. a specific and concrete historical community,
c. a specific and unique people's moral imagination,
d. their personal and communal identities,
2. their survival as an historical community in a larger material world.

In our case, we would have to develop a relational concept of place where large parts of our discourse/practices entail technological mediation. Virtual reality technologies pose a particularly difficult problem here because they seem to extract abstract patterns from every physical substrate except computational devices. Hence, as Heim has shown, even though computational representations are physically embodied in computers, virtual worlds are controlled by computational abstractions. Once these abstract representations are linked by data gloves, head-mounted displays, and even tactile sensors to our entire body, they have the power to completely disconnect our "perceptual reciprocity" with physical places. The question then becomes:

7. *How can we develop a relational concept of place in light of virtual reality developments?*

Indirectly, Basso again provides an answer. Basso showed how a "dialogue with real places" merged the abstract with the concrete because the biography and history of a person was brought to bear on the sensing of places. This was a fusion of perception and imagination. Likewise, if we attend to the biography and history that a person brings to bear on every new situation, whether real or virtual, and if we attend to what people

actually *do* in technologically-mediated situations, then we are likely to avoid developing ideas which split the abstract from the concrete. In education, this approach would point us towards issues of real learning whether we are talking about real or virtual places. "Real learning," writes David Orr in *Ecological Literacy*, "always increases intelligence" (Orr, 1996: xi). Real learning, to paraphrase Christopher Day, offers "a sense of roots ... in the wider natural world with its renewing rhythms" (Day, 1990: 26).

I would like to end here with a tentative answer to my original question: when is it important to be physically present in teaching and learning? Even though I have not addressed this question directly, but rather answered the why question in this paper, my answer is simply: always. We should always be consciously present where we are physically emplaced.

References

Abram, D. (1995). Out of the map, into the territory: The earthly topology of time. In D. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Wild Ideas*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minneapolis Press. pp. 97-115.

Abram, D. (1996). *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Alexander, C. (1977). *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, C. (1979). *The Timeless Way of Building*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Basso, K. (1996). *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Berleant, A. (1997). *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment*. Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press.

Bowers, C. A. (1988). *The Cultural Dimensions of Educational Computing: Understanding the Non-Neutrality of Technology*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bowers, C. A. (1993). *Education, Cultural Myths, and the Ecological Crisis: Toward Deep Changes*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Bowers, C. A. (1994). *Educating for an Ecologically Sustainable Culture*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Casey, E. S. (1993). *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Cobb, E. (1977). *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*. Dallas, TX: Spring Publications.

Day, C. (1990). *Places of the Soul: Architecture and Environmental Design as a Healing Art*. San Francisco, CA: Aquarian/Thorsons.

Duffy, T. M. & Jonassen, D. H. (Eds.) (1992). *Constructivism and the Technology of Instruction: A Conversation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Duffy, T. M., Lowyck, J., Jonassen, D. H., & Welsh, T. M. (Eds.). (1993). *Designing Environments for Constructive Learning*. New York, NY: Springer Verlag.

Evans, T. & Nation, D. (Eds.) (1989). *Critical Reflections on Distance Education*. New York, NY: Falmer Press.

Glendinning, C. (1994). *My Name is Chellis & I'm In Recovery from Western Civilization*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Gustafson, K. L. & Branch, R. M. (1997). *Survey of Instructional Development Models. Third Edition*. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearninghouse on Information & Technology.

Heim, M. (1993). *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Heim, M. (1998). *Virtual Realism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hiltz, S. R. (1994). *The Virtual Classroom: Learning Without Limits Via Computer Networks*. Norwood, NJ: ABLEX.

Hiss, T. (1990). *The Experience of Place*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Husserl, E. (1960). *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction To Phenomenology*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff.

Irigaray, L. (1993). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Translated by C. Burke & G. C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Keegan, D. (1996). *Foundations of Distance Education.Third Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kemmis, D. (1990). *Community and the Politics of Place*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

McKibben, B. (1992). *The Age of Missing Information*. New York, NY: Plume Books.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell,W. J. (1995). *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Moore, T. (1992). *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life.* New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Negroponte, N. (1995). *Being Digital.* New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Orr, D. W. (1992). *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a PostModern World.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Reigeluth, C. M. (Ed.). (1983). *Instructional Design Theories and Models: An Overview of Their Current Status.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Richey, R. (1986). *The Theoretical and Conceptual Bases of Instructional Design.* New York, NY: Kogan Page.

Spretnak, C. (1997).*The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Stegner, W. (1992). The sense of place. *Where the Bluebird Sings To The Lemonade Springs.* New York, NY: Penguin Books. pp. 199-206.

Streibel, M. J. (1986). Critical analysis of the use of computers in education. *Educational Communications and Technology Journal, 34*(3), 137-161.

Streibel, M.J., Stewart, J.H., Koedinger, K., Collins, A., & Jungck, J. (1987). MENDEL: An intelligent computer tutoring system for genetics problem solving, conjecturing, and understanding. *Machine-Mediated Learning, 2*(1&2), 129-159.

Streibel, M. J. (1993). Instructional design and human practice: What can we learn from Grundy's interpretation of Habermas' theory of technical and practical interests? In R. Muffoletto & N. N. Knupfer (Eds.), *Computers in Education: Social, Political, & Historical Perspectives.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. pp. 141-162.

Streibel, M.J. (1995). Instructional plans and situated learning: The challenge of Suchman's theory of situated action for instructional designers and instructional systems. In G. J. Anglin (Ed.), *Instructional Technology: Past, Present, and Future.* Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited. pp. 145-160.

Streibel, M. J. (1996). Queries about computer education and situated critical pedagogy. In H. McLellan (Ed.), *Situated Learning Perspectives.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Press. pp. 67-75.

Streibel, M. J. (1997). Information Technology, Community, Place, and Education. Paper presented at the annual conference of the *AECT (Association for Educational Communications and Technology).* Albuquerque, New Mexico, Feb. 13.

Yates, F. A. (1966). *The art of memory.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.